

# Introduction: towards new frontiers in the study of mega-events and the city

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For decades sporting and non-sporting mega-events have become indelibly imprinted upon the local geographies that host them. In particular, and since 1956 and the first mention of the Olympic 'legacy' at Melbourne, there has been an explicit connection between mega-events and the reconfigured urban realm. In more recent years, mega-events have become tied to a raft of longer-term urban policies that transcend the ephemeral 'stage set' of the actual event and resonate across time and place. Such policies commonly include aspirations for the 'regeneration' and enhanced 'sustainability' of a given area, the widespread securitisation of entire geographies and a reordering of urban governance. Regarding the latter, mega-events such as the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup draw a range of demands from international bodies (such as the IOC and FIFA respectively) that may clash with and abrade against local practices and policies. At the same time, the exceptionality of such events often impels the hosts to become recipients of global, mobile and standardised modes of governance. Further complicating the picture is the filtration of these currents through highly idiosyncratic localised settings, traditions and modes of

governance. Thus, the mega-event foment an often dramatic clash of the 'global' and the 'local', and the urban realm is the stage where these contestations are played out.

As such, mega-events invite analyses from a range of academic disciplines and across multiple levels of enquiry: ranging from the constellations of global governance (*inter alia* GREGORY, 2010) to the comparatively quantum level of the individual body (*inter alia* BERENTSEN, 2002). Thematic foci rest on the conceptual, the constitutional and the corporal. Respectively, these attend to debates over what makes an event 'mega', what becomes justified as a result, and what are the ramifications upon the individual? In turn, crucial questions are raised over *inter alia* governance, sovereignty, security, citizenship, globalisation, regeneration and the political economy: themes that are at the heart of the social sciences. Despite the significance and, in many respects, senescence of these issues, the mega-event has received surprisingly scant attention from the social sciences until comparatively recently. Instead, the task of countering IOC-endorsed hagiographies and their like has been most prominently administered via the insightful

critiques of journalists (*inter alia* JENNINGS, 1992, 1996, 2006). Nevertheless, a number of noteworthy academic studies emerged during the 1990s, which began to interrogate the relationship of the mega-event and the urban realm. Particularly notable among these are Hiller's studies of Olympic-related boosterist ideologies and interventions, and their ultimate impact on their host cities, whether they were successful in their bids to stage these events, such as Calgary in 1988 (HILLER, 1990) or not, such as Cape Town's ill-fated bid to host the 2004 Olympics (HILLER, 2000). During this period, others accented the way in which once industrial cities, unequivocal losers amid globalised post-Fordist transformations, utilised bids to host mega-events as a vehicle for urban branding and proposed renewal (ROCHE, 1994).

Following the security, financial and political disasters of the Munich, Montreal and Moscow Olympics respectively, attention has shifted towards reaping the potential profits of the commoditised leisure experiences brought by mega-events. In this respect, the privatised profit-driven Los Angeles Olympics of 1984 are an exemplar. Here, attracting tourism and international investment, thus orientating the place marketing of the city towards external consumers, has become a defining feature of mega-event branding and locates the urban mega-event among the discourses and practices of Harvey's (1989) 'entrepreneurial city'. Such developments have not been without their critics. Roche's (2000) later work, for example, points to the commodified Olympic theme park. Later, Fussey et al. (2011) stress how such exogenous place marketing stands in tension with the inward-focused and often-reneged promises of urban mega-event 'legacies'. With reference to the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Eick (2011) critiques the excesses of neo-liberal urban governance. Together, Sorkin's (1992) critique of late-modern urbanism as a *variation on a theme park* – replete with commercially-oriented Disneyland-inspired simulations, disconnections between spatial and cultural geographies, and infatuated with physical and technological security – holds particular resonance. Mega-event theme parks may be *in* a place, but they are rarely *of* it. As the nascent trend of hosting sporting mega-events into 'new' territories and 'tapping' new markets develops, as evinced by recent decisions by FIFA to host the 2018 and 2022 World Cups in Russia and Qatar respectively, these processes are set to intensify.

More recently, academic attention to mega-events, particularly the sporting variety, and their urban impacts has increased dramatically. Here, it is perhaps fitting that this interest in itself can be seen to have been 'event-led'. Particularly important in this respect have been the various analyses stimulated by the 2000 Sydney Olympics (*inter alia* LENSKY, 2002), the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany (EICK, 2011), the 2008 UEFA European football championships (*inter alia* KLAUSER, 2009), the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver (BOYLE; HAGGERTY, 2009) and the 2012 London Summer Olympics (*inter alia* POYNTER, 2009; POYNTER; MACRURY 2009; RICHARDS et al., 2010).

Such urban-focused scholarship has taken many forms yet principally coagulates around a number of themes. Prominent among this literature have been analysis of branding of the city and, of 'community' involvement and physical legacies (notably ROCHE, 2000; LENSKY, 2002; PREUSS, 2004; CASHMAN, 2006; CASHMAN; HUGHES, 1999; TOOHEY; VEAL, 2007; GOLD; GOLD, 2007, 2010). Other work has focused on the aspirations, application and aftermath of mega-event led regeneration programmes (CHALKLEY; ESSEX, 1999; GARCIA-RAMON; ALBERT, 2000; GOLD; GOLD, 2005; GREY; MOONEY, 2011). The application of (often-exceptional) mega-event security operations to the urban realm has also received significant academic attention of late. Prior to these recent exigencies, much mega-event security-related analyses honed in on specific operations at particular cities such as the studies of Munich (ASTON, 1983; REEVE, 2001), Los Angeles (CHARTERS, 1983), Atlanta (BUNTIN, 2000), Sydney (THOMPSON, 1996, SADLIER, 1996) and Salt Lake City (DECKER et al., 2005; BELLAVITA, 2007). Other studies attempting to adopt longer-term perspectives often resort to narrative descriptions of the two most famous Olympic-related terrorist attacks at Munich and Atlanta (*inter alia* GAMARRA, 2009). Better studies (*inter alia* SANAN, 1996; THOMPSON, 1999; COTTRELL, 2003; ATKINSON; YOUNG, 2008; HINDS; VLACHOU, 2007) adopt a more systematic approach, although often stopping short of theoretical and conceptual interpretation. Most recently, more critical work has begun to emerge (*inter alia* BOYLE, 2005; BOYLE; HAGGERTY, 2009; GIULIANOTTI; KLAUSER, 2009; COAFFEE; FUSSEY, 2010; BENNETT; HAGGERTY, 2011), seeking to apply conceptual and theoretical

frameworks to understand the area of mega-event security, although this field is nascent.

Overall, the burgeoning academic interest in the mega-event and the city has provided useful foundation for future analysis and served to give greater form to a number of emerging themes. Among these, there are a number of issues that are set to retain importance and feature prominently in the future. These include the selective branding and the imaginary of the entrepreneurial city for the global audience. The increased emphasis on mega-events as a vehicle for local and community aggrandizement suggests an inherent tension with both these externally focussed agendas and the construction of transnational Olympic ideals and identities. Related to this is the relationship between global, national and local governance. In particular, significant contestation may occur as internationally (and undemocratically) derived commercially-driven agendas are imposed upon, integrated with or challenged by idiosyncratic local settings. In this sense, the accelerated neo-liberal economic arrangements of post-Soviet Russia and of Qatar, respective hosts of the 2018 and 2020 World Cups, render them highly receptive to the avaricious elements of FIFA's operation. Globalisation's immobile losers – Bauman's (1998) 'vagabonds' – at the national and sub-national scale are likely to experience mega-event pageantry rather differently. Overlapping these issues are tensions over exceptionality and legitimacy and of ephemerality and legacy. These specific issues are germane to a range of mega-event related processes staged by the urban realm. Recent work (FRENCH, 2009; FUSSEY; COAFFEE, 2011) has sought to explore and apply Agamben's concept of 'exceptionality' in relation to spatial realm and to the mega-event. Here, a number of developing themes are apparent, including debates over what becomes 'permissible' in relation to securing and staging a mega-event and, also, the tensions between exceptionality and the more routinised forms and processes of control operating at local, national and transnational levels. Such debates also apply to the easily promised and more rarely delivered quixotic regeneration legacies. A related theme here is the way in which post-9/11 tensions and other insecurities have served to increasingly embed 'security' – replete with its inevitable inclusionary/exclusionary dynamics – into such regenerative aspirations.

In a timely addition to this growing academic canon, this special session of *urbe* seeks to build on these developments and consider the hosting of mega-events across broad types – sporting and non-sporting – and across expansive geographies. In doing so, the session covers a range of conceptual, thematic and geographical terrains, and the disciplines of sociology, urban planning, human geography, cultural studies and the visual arts are recruited to critically explore the mega-event across Europe, Africa and South America.

The papers composing this special session cover events that are both diverse and cover an extended temporal range, from Lisbon's Expo 98 and Portugal's UEFA Euro 2004, to the 2007 European Capitals of Culture (held in Luxembourg and Sibiu, Romania) and South Africa's 2010 FIFA World Cup, and towards the forthcoming 2012 London Olympics and the upcoming FIFA World Cup and XXXI Olympics in Brazil.

The session starts with Jon Coaffee and Pete Fussey's take on the growing securitization of the urban realm as a corollary of hosting a mega-event. The authors build on and develop extant literature attending to the securitization of the urban realm, and argue that many approaches to "safety and security" can be coalesced under the rubric of "resilience". Here, amid a contested terrain and continually shifting national security arrangements, urban local and international managerial strategies aspire towards protective as well as predictive regimes. These serve to yoke regeneration and security together and become justified under the exceptionality (if, in practice, highly routinized features) of the London 2012 Olympics.

Isaac Marrero's "London 2012: space of exception" also takes the London 2012 Olympics as a case study, but to explore how Agamben's 'exceptionality' is configured through the "legal architecture of exception". The argument is built around the contracts, regulations and public-private bodies that emerge around mega-events, the extraordinary powers granted to international bodies and the "financial engineering" that privatises profits and socialises losses. The exceptionality of the Olympic "space" is reinforced by the criminalisation of non-sanctioned commercial, religious or political expressions and the enactment of a security "island" surrounded by a "peripheral buffer zone" where exception becomes

normalised and permanent. The mega-event, therefore, legitimises a new urban regime where citizens are reduced to forced participants and exception-related visions of order enter the fabric of urban management.

In his study of Johannesburg during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Pavoni also picks up the theme of the exceptional. Noting how “normative ordering(s) emerge out of the [...] extraordinary spatio-temporal context of the mega-event”, there is discernable continuity to the urban routine even during such times of seeming exceptionality. Yet this continuity neither represents linearity nor homogeneity. Instead, Pavoni articulates how the multiplicity of the city accommodates complex forces and processes that overlap and often sit in opposition. Given that cities are not blank slates, and that they host a range of extant and embedded processes, mega-events are thus not simply grafted on to these settings, nor do they obliterate them. Instead, Pavoni argues, a process of ‘tuning’ this multiplicity takes place, the city’s ‘atmo-rhythms’ are calibrated in order to affect a form of harmony.

Focusing more on the urban regeneration aspect of the mega-event impact, in “Del sueño olímpico al Proyecto Maravilha” Mauro Castro explores the impact of forthcoming mega-events in Brazil on the plans to regenerate the harbour area of Rio de Janeiro. Plans to emulate Bilbao’s “Guggenheim effect” (a common legitimating device for regenerative aspirations, see HATHERLEY, 2010) and the “Barcelona model” in this particular space, which had been delayed for years due to the competing interests of the myriad of public and private actors involved, finally became “a dream come true” when the *prefeitura* and the Olympic Committee agreed to build event-related infrastructure in the area. The 5M square-metre, a victim of deindustrialisation in the 90s, is therefore set to become a tourist attraction, an entertainment centre and an upscale residential neighbourhood capable of attracting investment and surplus value. The author likens this development to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century version of the “growth machine”. Again, specific laws are passed to allow for the necessary regulatory modifications to take place, and public bodies take on the financial risks hoping that future private investment will compensate. Thus, urban planning is “financiarised” and a “new institutionality” is born, based on Public-Private Partnerships and a new geometry of power that minimises risk and privatises local governance.

Starting where the last paper ends – pointing to the need to evaluate the future impact of mega-events – but going back in time to depict the legacy of past mega-events and draw lessons from their impact on urban settings and public policy, Vitor Durao’s “Mega-events in Portugal” compares the International Exposition held in Lisbon in 1998 and the 2004 Football European Championship which took place throughout the country. The author emphasises how the planning and execution of mega-events are crucial in terms of maximising their potential positive impact later on, and how the key to turning ephemeral events into permanent improvements lays in the ability of the actors involved to build the long-term social impact of the event in its conception and to escape the enthusiasm that often leads to bad planning decisions. Long-term planning and technical expertise, however, need flexibility, as both cases described tried to avoid past mistakes but ended up making similar financial and planning mistakes and joining the ranks of “post-event failures”.

Emilia Palonen focuses away from the sporting realm to the European City of Culture award as a mega-event. Here, she considers how ‘culture’ – particularly partial and anodyne articulations of culture – are used as a vehicle for transmitting the values and ideals of ‘Europeanness’ and of the EU more broadly. Such developments, also connect with broader-processes of ‘culture-led’ urban rebranding and regeneration, are traced back to the award of European City of Culture status to Glasgow in 1990, where culture was used as a vehicle to attract investment and reverse years of post-industrial urban decline. In her analysis, the author uses her involvement as an artist during the 2007 European City of Culture-related events in the Romanian city of Sibiu and the wider region of Luxembourg. Here, she argues that public engagement with the ‘European project’ shifted considerably across different urban settings and was particularly marked in the distinction between traditional urban centres and the areas that encircle them.

While their outlook is different and they represent the diversity and interdisciplinarity that characterizes the literature on mega-events, the articles share many common trends and establish a dialogue between them. When discussing the 2010 FIFA World Cup and Johannesburg, Pavoni’s work may be considered to add further detail and depth to the gentrification-centred analysis represented by Castro’s



paper on Rio's *Projeto Maravilha*. At the same time, it builds bridges with Marrero and with Coaffee and Fussey, whom emphasise the centrality of the securitisation processes when seeking to understand the dynamics, logics and legacies of mega-events. Moreover, when analysing the specific impact of events staged as far back as 1998, Duraó's paper on Portugal picks up a key theme that is present throughout the special session: the need to understand local policy perspectives in order to counter more macro-level explanations that may assume a unity of purpose among the many stakeholders involved in hosting the mega-event. Moreover, all authors mention the influence of former mega-events upon the planning of new ones, therefore unearthing a pattern of trans-urban and inter-city knowledge and policy transfer at the global level. Such transference may be observed across borders, institutional divisions and traditional distinctions between public and private and that surely deserve more academic attention and empirical analysis. Finally, the link between "exceptionality" and "shock", urban regeneration, security and a new articulation between public and private in the reordering of urban governance emerge as a crucial analytical thread for the analysis of mega-events across Europe, Africa and South America.

Together, the papers comprising this special session capitalise on the expanding literature on mega-events and the city, and extend the analysis into new temporal, geographical and cultural territories. As the mechanisms for the transfer of urban policy and the execution of transnational governance develop and intensify in relation to the mega-event, analyses of the urban impacts of such events across diverse settings are set to remain important and urgent for many years to come.

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